



Norwegians and Swedes are astonished by the openness of Canadians, says Monique L'heureux.



David Perdue's experience of Canadian diversity has primed him for the diversity of the wider world.

many first-generation Canadians, Priya Sinha was encouraged to study her Indian culture while growing up. She even performed traditional Indian dance in front of thousands on Parliament Hill during Canada Day. "It doesn't get much more Canadian than that," she says.

Newcomer Carmen Larsen-Grijalva is impressed by the warmth of Canadians.



David Perdue, second secretary (economic), trade policy, with the Canadian embassy in Tokyo, said he only really appreciated Canadian diversity after moving to Montreal to attend McGill University. "I was suddenly exposed to groups of people I had never been exposed to before, including members of Montreal's Jewish community, exchange students from Japan and, lo and behold, French-speaking Canadians—the kind of direct experience of diversity that defines us to a large extent."

Perdue believes he's lucky to have had a similarly comprehensive experience of Japan. "In my career, I've been lucky enough to experience full immersion in Japanese culture through a one-year exchange as a university student in Tokyo, as a Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme participant working in a small-town government office in Kyushu and, recently, on exchange through DFAIT for a 10-month term, working as the only foreigner in the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry."

Perdue recently experienced the extent of Canadians' desire to help others after the earthquake and tsunami hit Japan on March 11. While many foreign embassies in Tokyo decided to close or move their operations elsewhere, he was proud that Canada made the decision to remain in Japan to help.

"Thanks to that decision, I think we made a real difference in assisting Canadians here in Japan, and we were also able to make meaningful contributions of supplies and support to our Japanese friends," he says.

"Every day I feel proud coming to work at the embassy, but these past few weeks in particular have made me feel even more privileged to be here representing Canada."

When being Canadian is an asset

Sometimes, being Canadian isn't just something to be proud of—it can be an important asset in difficult circumstances. Laura Ospina, now a foreign affairs communications strategist, was living in Addis Ababa during the Eritrea–Ethiopia War, which took place from 1998 to 2000. One day, protests broke out in the Ethiopian capital and Ospina found herself surrounded by anti-American protesters.

"They saw that I was Canadian from the identification on my license plate and they let me go by with no problems. It was a very tense situation," she says.

"Finding myself in that situation made me realize that being Canadian gives you a certain feeling of safety in volatile parts of the world. The world sees us as kind and generous and not intrusive. Neutral yet still helpful."